

Nurses and Smoking: It's a Union Issue

- Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke are occupational health and safety issues that are important to unions and their members. Tobacco smoke causes numerous health effects, including heart disease, cancer, COPD and stroke.¹ So reducing exposures at the worksite is critical for worker health. There is a nationwide trend toward smoke-free worksites, especially in the venues where nurses work.
- Although the majority of nurses don't smoke and many others have quit, smoking is still an important issue among nurses: 15% of Registered Nurses smoke; 28% of Licensed Practical Nurses smoke.² These are higher rates of smoking than for other health care professionals.
- Nurses' unions are at the forefront of efforts to improve workers' health and lessen or end major sources of job-related hazards and stress for nurses. Under demanding working conditions, it is not surprising that nurses who smoke often describe trying to quit as stressful. Smoking cessation is a part of the broader health and safety efforts of nurses' unions.
- Smoking is a workplace issue.³ Through efforts on smoking cessation and worksite issues related to smoking, nurses' unions can enhance their efforts to ensure a healthy workforce in a healthy workplace. Unions can work to emphasize that all nurses, smokers and nonsmokers, get their breaks during work shifts.
- Nurses' unions are in a unique position to provide leadership to support smoking cessation among their members by providing resources, support in quitting and in addressing worksite issues related to smoking.
- Unions are trusted sources of information for their members. Nurses' unions can provide their members information on cessation resources, such as the Tobacco Free Nurses website, national and state quitlines, and other cessation resources.
- Nurses' unions can build support among members for those trying to quit. Smoking is a powerful addiction, and quitting can be a difficult process. Studies indicate that support by colleagues for those trying to quit increases success rates.³
- Nurses' unions can be in the forefront of current trends to mandate smoking cessation counseling for patients who smoke by sponsoring training to help nurses assist their patients in quitting.⁴
- As more worksites become smokefree, nurses' unions can collectively bargain for member access to smoking cessation treatment and coverage. Ideally, this should include coverage for pharmacotherapy (for instance, "the patch" and bupropion) and counseling.⁵

- 1 **The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General.** 2004. http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/sgr_2004/index.htm.
- 2 **2001-2002 Current Population Survey (CPS) Tobacco Use Supplement.** <http://riskfactor.cancer.gov/studies/tus-cps>.
- 3 **Sarna, L., Bialous, S. A., Wewers, M. E., Froelicher, E. S., & Danao, L.** 2005. "Nurses, smoking, and the workplace." *Res Nurs Health*, 28(1), 79-90.
- 4 **Helping Smokers Quit: A Guide for Nurses.** May 2005. <http://www.tobaccofreenurses.org>.
- 5 **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coverage for Tobacco Use Cessation Treatments,** http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/educational_materials/cessation/index.html.

RESOURCES

Tobacco Free Nurses

<http://www.tobaccofreenurses.org>

National Quitline

1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669)

The Organized Labor and Tobacco Control Network

<http://www.laborandtobacco.org>

Smoking Cessation Leadership Center

<http://smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu>

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

<http://www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm>

